

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Sept. 8, 2011

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State Historical Society acquires photographs of Belle Fourche Dam construction

PIERRE, S.D. -- The South Dakota State Historical Society-Archives recently acquired construction photographs of the Belle Fourche (Orman) Dam.

The collection consists of 101 photographs, mostly 4x5-inch postcards, and some 8x10 images, of the construction of the Belle Fourche (Orman) Dam.

The photos were transferred from the Victor E. Thorsell Collection at the Boise State University Library.

The construction period for the dam was from 1906-1911 and consisted of a common earth-fill dam 6,262 feet long and 122 feet high, protected upstream by riprap and concrete blocks.

Scenes in the collection include: workers and equipment, dam construction, making and laying concrete blocks, horses, steam shovels, steam tractors, earth moving equipment, trains and train cars, conduits and the spillway.

The dam, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1977, is located on Owl Creek and is approximately 10 miles east of Belle Fourche, in Butte County. The dam was completed in 1911 to store water for agricultural use, creating the Belle Fourche Reservoir.

At the time of its completion, the Belle Fourche (Orman) Dam was the largest earthen dam on Earth. In 1989, the dam was designated as an official National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.

Select images from the Belle Fourche (Orman) Dam Collection are on the State Archives Facebook page via <http://history.sd.gov/Archives>.

To donate items relating to the history of South Dakota, please contact Matthew Reitzel, manuscript archivist, at (605) 773-3615 or Dan Brosz, curator of collections, at (605) 773-6013.

The South Dakota State Archives is located in the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The State Archives is open Monday through Friday and the first Saturday of each month from 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. CDT. Contact the archives by phone at (605) 773-3804, or email archref@state.sd.us

The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council, and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society's world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit www.history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.

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